

Regional News

The takeover was announced on Saturday during a function presided over by Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja.

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The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has officially taken over the management of Bugoma Central Forest Reserve following years of widespread degradation, encroachment, and criticism that the National Forestry Authority (NFA) had failed to adequately protect the ecosystem.

The takeover was announced on Saturday during a function presided over by Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja in Kikuube District.

The move follows a presidential directive transferring management of the forest from NFA under the Ministry of Water and Environment to UWA under the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities.

The government says the decision is intended to restore and safeguard one of Uganda's most critical ecosystems after years of destruction caused by charcoal burning, illegal timber harvesting, farming, and human settlement. Bugoma Forest, which spans 41,144 hectares, was gazetted as a central forest reserve in 1932.

Speaking during the handover ceremony, Ms Nabbanja said the government could no longer tolerate the continued degradation of Bugoma Forest.

"With the powers entrusted to me, I direct that UWA takes charge of Bugoma Forest and enforces its protection role. All people within the forest must be evicted with immediate effect," she said.

The prime minister warned that no compensation would be paid to recent encroachers and directed that no one should return to the forest after eviction.

"Only people who occupied the area before 1932 will be allowed to remain on their land," she added.

Ms Nabbanja, who toured parts of the forest before the official handover, expressed concern about the extent of de-

Govt bets on UWA to save degraded Bugoma forest



Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja with other officials from UWA inspect Bugoma forest on Saturday. PHOTO / SEGUJJA BYOMUGABI

struction she witnessed.

"Bugoma Forest is very important for rainfall formation, carbon absorption, and environmental protection. Once forests are destroyed, people suffer from unnecessary diseases and climate-related challenges," she said.

The takeover follows a February 2026 directive by President Museveni ordering the transfer of the forest to UWA. "I received a letter dated October 6, 2025, from Tourism Minister Tom Butime regarding degradation, deforestation, and encroachment on Bugoma Forest Reserve. All this must stop forthwith," Mr Museveni wrote.

The President also directed the Chief of Defence Forces to investigate allegations that UPDF personnel are involved in the destruction of the forest.

Mr Museveni further ordered the immediate eviction of all encroachers and reiterated that compensation

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would not be considered. Mr Museveni also proposed upgrading Bugoma Forest Reserve into a national park to strengthen its protection.

Tourism Minister Tom Butime welcomed the transfer, saying UWA had demonstrated stronger conservation and enforcement capacity over the years.

"Bugoma is one of the largest ecosystems we have in Uganda. The increased pressure on the forest called for gov-

ernment intervention to safeguard the ecosystem," he said.

Mr Butime commended the prime minister for steering consultations that led to the transfer and stressed that all encroachers and illegal operators must vacate the reserve immediately.

The UWA Executive Director, Dr James Musinguzi, said deployment of enforcement teams had already begun.

"We are deploying personnel on the ground, using drones and aerial surveillance to monitor activities in the forest. Illegal charcoal burning, timber cutting, and farming will stop immediately," Dr Musinguzi said.

He warned that anyone found carrying out illegal activities within the forest boundaries would be arrested and prosecuted.

"We have enough manpower and equipment to enforce the law," he added, while calling on local communities and

BUGOMA'S IMPORTANCE

Bugoma Forest is one of Uganda's largest natural forests and serves as a habitat for chimpanzees and other wildlife species. Environmentalists say continued destruction of the forest threatens biodiversity, rainfall patterns, and livelihoods in the Albertine region. The forest also plays a critical role in carbon absorption and protection of river systems feeding surrounding communities.

leaders to support conservation efforts. NFA officials admitted that protection of Bugoma Forest had become increasingly difficult because of population pressure and illegal activities around the reserve.

Mr Bowazi Basigirenda, the NFA sector ranger manager for Masindi covering Bunyoro, said degradation had worsened due to increasing settlement around the forest.

"Population growth and the increasing number of homesteads around the forest have fuelled degradation. Areas such as Nyairingo and Kaseeta are heavily affected," he said.

Mr Basigirenda revealed that more than 364 deforestation-related cases had been reported to police, while 30 files had been submitted to the Wildlife Standards Office in Kampala.

He added that NFA operations had led to the impounding of several vehicles transporting charcoal, many of which remain parked at NFA offices in Kikuube District. Large quantities of illegally harvested timber were also confiscated.

Acting Kikuube District chairperson Vincent Opio said the district council passed a resolution in December 2022 supporting the elevation of Bugoma Forest into a national park.

"We thank government for listening to our concerns and supporting conservation efforts," Mr Opio said.